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ABSTRACT

The document addresses remedial or developmental programs in postsecondary California education. It also presents the results of the 1998 basic skills survey of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee. Basic Skills courses usually refer to precollegiate basic skills courses. These are courses designed to address the reading, writing, and computational skill deficiencies of students not meeting the skills requisites for the associate degree, transfer, and/or other college-level courses. The survey found among the colleges much variation in practices but many similar problems developing strong basic skills instruction. Some common challenges facing basic skills instructors include classes that are too large, lack of adequate funding, ineffective assessment tools, inadequate research, lack of qualified reading instructors, problems coordinating programs, and insufficient faculty development opportunities. In spite of these challenges, many colleges have developed exemplary programs that stand as models. Based on these successes, a number of recommendations for good practice have been made for local senates to consider as they recommend policy for student success, planning and budgeting, curriculum, and other academic and professional matters. Appendix contains basic skills survey results. (Contains 12 references.) (JA)

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The State of Basic Skills Instruction in California Community Colleges

The Academic Senate for California Community Colleges

Adopted April 2000

R.M. Silverman

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Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee, 1997-2000

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ABSTRACT

The Master Plan for Higher Education requires that California community colleges provide access to all of the State's high school graduates and anyone over the age of eighteen who can benefit from instruction. An ever-increasing number of students are arriving at our doors inadequately prepared for college-level work. The colleges have responded with a variety of approaches to meet the need for basic skills instruction.

Basic Skills courses usually refer to what Title 5 specifies as *precollegiate basic skills* courses. These are courses designed to address the reading, writing, and computational skill deficiencies of students not meeting the skills requisites for the Associate Degree, transfer, and/or other college-level courses. Terms such as *remedial* or *developmental* are sometimes used interchangeably and other times used to refer to different levels of instruction.

The 1998 basic skills survey of the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges' Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee found among the colleges much variation in practices but many similar problems developing strong basic skills instruction. Some common challenges facing basic skills instructors include classes that are too large, lack of adequate funding, ineffective assessment tools, inadequate research, lack of qualified reading instructors, problems coordinating programs, and insufficient faculty development opportunities. In spite of these challenges, many colleges have developed exemplary programs that stand as models. Based on these successes, a number of recommendations for good practice have been made for local senates to consider as they recommend policy for student success, planning and budgeting, curriculum, and other academic and professional matters.

While success in both mathematics and English basic skills courses seem crucial to students' subsequent success in college, the Academic Senate's survey resulted in far more information on reading and writing programs and far less on mathematics programs. This paper is intended as an overview. Many findings suggest avenues for further investigation, including investigation and analysis of the state of basic skills instruction, particularly in mathematics programs.

BASIC SKILLS AS A COMMUNITY COLLEGE MISSION

The Master Plan for Higher Education adopted in 1960, revised in 1972 and again in 1984 continues to guide higher education in California. In spite of the fact that it has been under siege for 15 years and that funding has been far from adequate to meet the increasing demand for services, the philosophical tenets laid out in the Plan have persisted and continue to influence much of what we believe and what we teach in community colleges today.

We have not yet forsaken the promise in the plan that the citizens of the state will do whatever is required to offer access to quality higher education to all high school graduates and to anyone 18 years or older who can benefit from instruction. In the community colleges, this commitment means providing whatever basic skills instruction is needed to address students' needs and to prepare them for general and vocational education.

In spite of critics who recognize only the transfer and vocational education functions of our institutions, the community colleges, to maintain open access, have remained committed in their mission to serve students who need basic skills instruction.

The need for this service is growing. According to Lee Lazarick, writing in the *Community College Journal* (October/November 1997), community colleges are doing the bulk of remedial instruction through postsecondary education. As the California State University System attempts to move out of remedial instruction, community colleges will be responsible for more basic skills instruction with more pressure to deliver effectively.

In fact, according to a survey conducted by the Academic Senate in February 1998, overall 49 percent of all entering students from 56 community colleges that responded were directed to basic skills courses. Eighteen of those colleges directed 50 percent or more of their students to basic skills courses.

These figures compare with national statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicating that 41 percent of students at two-year colleges, 25 percent at four-year public institutions, and 13 percent at four-year private colleges need basic skills instruction.

BASIC SKILLS DEFINED

What exactly is a basic skills course? What is a basic skills student?

Definitions for *basic skills* vary. Of course, *basic skills* can apply to any skill that seems relatively basic to any discipline or area of study, or to any set of related skills that are recognized as higher order skills. But for the purposes of Academic Senate statements in general and this paper in particular, *basic skills* needs to be defined as it relates to Title 5 Regulations and related applications.

Precollegiate Basic Skills

The most frequently applied definition of *basic skills* courses appears in Title 5, ' 55502 (d), which specifies *precollegiate basic skills* courses as courses in reading, writing, computation, and English as a second Language which are designated by the [local] district as nondegree credit courses. So whether a course is classified as *precollegiate basic skills* depends on how the local district, on the advice of the curriculum committee, classifies it. For this reason there are some inconsistencies regarding what level of coursework is designated as *basic skills*. Also included as *precollegiate basic skills* are occupational courses designed to provide students with foundation skills necessary for college-level occupational course work (Title 5, ' 55002 (1) c & d).

Although Title 5 includes reference to other nondegree applicable courses that include basic skills (e.g., Title 5, ' 55002 (1) (B)), these sections do not describe *precollegiate* basic skills courses and are not the ones most people identify with basic skills courses on their local campuses.

Credit/Noncredit Mode

Basic skills courses can be offered in either credit (non-degree applicable) or noncredit modes. Courses described above are offered in the credit mode.

Noncredit basic skills classes include the following skills areas: English as a Second Language (ESL), elementary and secondary basic skills, literacy, General Education Diploma (GED) preparation, and occupational/vocational basic skills/ESL.

Developmental/Remedial

We should also recognize yet another distinction often applied to basic skills courses, the distinction between *developmental* and *remedial*. The California State University Committee on Educational Policy (*Precollegiate Instruction in the CSU*, January 1995, p.23) recognizes two types of precollegiate (i.e., basic skills) coursework in English and mathematics. These are based on whether the student has ever been fully exposed to the work of the precollegiate course under consideration. If the student has been exposed to the content of the course, the student is considered remedial. If the student has never been exposed to the content of the same course, then that student is considered a *developmental* student. This document does not provide an exact definition of *exposed*, nor does it indicate the usefulness of this distinction to the student or teacher.

The United States Department of Education has defined remedial education courses as reading, writing and mathematics courses for college students lacking those skills necessary to perform college-level work at the level required by the institution. This statement includes no distinction

of whether a student has ever been given the opportunity to learn the material of such courses. Norton Grubb and Associates, in their 1999 book on community college teaching, *Honored But Invisible*, combine *remedial* and *developmental*. They define *remedial developmental* education as a class or activity intended to meet the needs of students who initially do not have the skills, experience, or orientation necessary to perform at a level that the institution or instructor recognizes as regular or college-level instruction (p.74).

Because *remedial has a negative connotation*, the term *developmental* has been favored by faculty who teach such courses and provide student services. For the purposes of this paper, the writers have referred to these courses as *basic skills*.

SURVEY OF BASIC SKILLS PRACTICES

In its 1998 survey (see Appendix), the Academic Senate focused on precollegiate reading, writing and mathematics skills to obtain a snapshot of basic skills instruction as it exists in California community colleges today, to outline common problems that basic skills students and instructors face, and most importantly to report exemplary practices. The discussions below are based upon the results of this survey.

THE CHALLENGE OF TEACHING BASIC SKILLS COURSES

Some citizens and legislators believe that providing funding for community college students who are under-prepared for college is like paying twice, the perception being that the state may be paying again for what it has already paid for in high school (Lazarick).

However, Hunter Boylan, of the National Center for Developmental Education, maintains that passing [college] developmental [i.e., basic skills] courses has been positively correlated with success in college as measured by cumulative GPA and retention (qtd. in *Developmental Education Task Force Report*, Los Medanos College, Spring 1998).

Grubb and Associates, in a national study based on observations of community college classes, found the best and the worst teaching in this arena. Instruction ranged from the most inspired student- and learning-centered approaches and the most deadly drill-and-kill classes (Grubb, p. 174). They cited the need for citizens and legislators to recognize the difference between the popular notion that institutions have dumbed down courses to match lowered student and instructor expectations and a carefully designed and rigorous course of remediation. They conclude, Awe can see that developmental [i.e., basic skills] education is one of the most difficult teaching challenges and needs to be rescued from its second-hand status.

Indeed survey respondents concurred. They cited challenges tied to common problems of large class size, lack of adequate funding, uncertain assessment methods including a lack of multiple

measures, a lack of quality reading instruction, a scarcity of quality full-time instructors, a lack of solid research, and insufficient faculty development and program coordination.

Class Size

Survey results reveal that funding and class sizes are inexorably linked in many colleges. Because basic skills students need a great deal of individual attention, instructors believe it is important that class sizes be manageable. In California's enrollment driven funding situation, however, classes for basic skills students often include numbers far too high for such attention and thus inhibit best teaching practices. In addition, the inability to offer small classes and maintain low teacher-student ratios limit opportunities for support services such as tutoring and study groups, which do not normally generate FTES numbers.

A few colleges limit enrollments in basic skills courses (12 percent of responding colleges maintain basic skills writing class enrollments under 25 students), but 62 percent report class sizes between 25 and 30, and 24 percent allow for enrollments to soar to more than 30.

Finding an unequivocal answer to the class size issue is vitally important to the future of American public education. Class size research shows an important link between lowered student/teacher ratios and higher achievement, reports Douglas Mitchell, as long ago as 1966, in *How Changing Class Size Affects Classrooms and Students*.

Community college students should be assured that their institutions have optimized their chances of success. To do so requires that colleges provide classes small enough for the individualized attention that is necessary for students who need basic skills instruction to learn. Large class sizes tend to make educational institutions impersonal. Whereas traditional students who are already independent learners can make progress on their own in such situations, less skilled students who require higher levels of support are likely to drop out of content-specific courses. When they drop out, it appears that they have failed to learn or were unable to make passing grades or to earn enough units to remain matriculated. But the real reason for their lack of persistence may be the way we have structured most educational institutions, as places where only certain kinds of students can learn well (Grubb, p.343).

Funding

An overwhelming majority of survey respondents saw insufficient funding as a barrier to offering quality instruction to basic skills students.

Although some colleges identify basic skills instruction as a viable and intrinsic component of the system, insufficient funding inhibits their efforts to improve the performance of basic skills students. The following remarks by survey respondents typify the attitudes expressed: Because of budget restraints, our equipment is ancient and not reliable; Our students become discouraged when they have to wait 3-5 minutes for a computer to be ready to use; and We need to be in the

market place.

A large number of colleges in our sample have managed to supplement funding by securing Title III grants, federally funded grants that offer assistance to institutional programs working to increase the retention and success of at-risk students. Most of these at-risk students need to be in basic skills courses. These grants have allowed colleges to increase staffing, purchase equipment, and design innovative curriculum. The downside of reliance upon these grants, however, is that when the grants expire, colleges that have been unable to institutionalize changes developed with the grants are back where they started, scraping for dollars.

While overcap funding for basic skills courses has helped some colleges, these funds are insufficient, and many colleges especially those in large urban areas who are struggling to maintain enrollment numbers are not eligible to receive these funds.

Assessment

Issues with assessment abound. Respondents to the survey expressed a variety of problems with assessment, an element essential for appropriate placement of students. Whereas almost all colleges reported having an assessment test and using multiple measures, 81 percent of the colleges indicated that self-selection was a primary avenue for students to enter basic skills classes.

Some indicated that assessment tests are removed from the actual curriculum of the course and, therefore, lack content validity. One college urged the involvement of faculty in direct implementation of assessment instruments, as faculty understand the entry skills students need for specific classes. Content review of courses and alignment of assessment instruments with course expectations was seen as crucial.

Some survey respondents identified problems assessing ESL students. Often ESL students, because of language deficiencies, receive recommendations to enroll in basic skills classes for which they are not suited. All assessment should include multiple measures and effective counseling/advisement, required by matriculation regulations and regarded as good practices. While virtually all respondents reported that their colleges use multiple measures to assess and place students, none elaborated on what measures were used or on how they were used. It is important to have clearly established and validated criteria such as student surveys that seek information on educational background, attitudes toward reading, life experiences, and the amount of time students expect to allocate to their studies. Some survey respondents stressed the critical need for teachers to explain to students who are new to college the expectations of all college courses, especially expectations of study and practice time outside of class.

Clearly, work needs to continue in the area of matriculation, with regard to assessment and placement in basic skills courses to assure student success and retention.

Quality Full-time Instructors

Respondents indicated that 56.5 percent of their basic skills instructors came from the part-time ranks and 43.5 percent from the full-time instructors. On the noncredit side, the use of part-time faculty for basic skills is even more overwhelming, with fully 70 percent of noncredit basic skills taught by part-time faculty. Developing a quality basic skills strategy demands much time and a collective effort among faculty. Part-time faculty, by necessity, are on the move and often unable to attend planning and coordination meetings necessary to program development. (Even when part-time faculty members have the time and dedication to help with these efforts, they are generally not paid for this outside-of-class time.) Furthermore, if part-time faculty teach only basic skills courses, they run the danger of being viewed as not scholarly or academic enough to teach higher-level courses.

Some respondents believe that recognizing basic skills as a separate discipline would provide a higher profile to basic skills programs and to those who specialize in teaching basic skills courses. But in 1991 the Academic Senate decided against recommending the establishment of a separate basic skills discipline, reasoning that there was value to basic skills students being taught by discipline experts who teach the full range of courses. This is essential if faculty are to prepare students to move into college-level curriculum successfully. Testimony at five statewide hearings helped determine that the creation of such a discipline might lead to the fragmentation of curriculum, isolation of both faculty and students, and lowering of standards for faculty (*Ad Hoc Basic Skills Committee Final Report*, February 9, 1991). Essentially there was fear that the establishment of a separate basic skills discipline would lead to a two-tiered system, where basic skills students would be regarded as inferior.

The 1991 report indicated the concern that students could become trapped in remedial programs. Proponents of the view that basic skills instructors should be discipline experts saw basic skills courses as serving the general curriculum by preparing students for higher-level courses (p. 33).

Successful programs seem to flourish when they are developed and taught by a cadre of full-time instructors who support basic skills instruction, who work together to conceive a program, and who teach the full range of courses.

Quality Reading Instruction

Reading is the most essential basic skill that students need to succeed academically, yet finding instructors qualified to teach reading is difficult. One college reported that it frequently had to cancel classes because it could not find reading instructors.
A developmental reading program under the auspices of or working closely with the English

department should provide students with a range of reading courses applicable to the general education requirements of the Associate Degree. In many colleges, developmental reading courses are entry-level courses into the composition program.

For optimal instruction the faculty need classrooms that allow for traditional lectures, demonstrations, and interaction between the teacher and students. In addition, classrooms with movable desks necessary for collaborative activities help create an environment more conducive to learning. Classrooms should also be equipped with a computer, overhead projector, and video and audio capabilities. Classrooms might need to be retrofitted with fiber optics and the systems necessary to install computers, networking, and telecommunications equipment. Networked systems would enable the faculty and students to communicate with students and professionals at other locations; thus, access to the Internet and the World Wide Web is imperative.

The addition of full-time faculty who are prepared to teach reading reflects an institution's increased commitment to helping students develop college level literacy skills. Institutions should also support faculty attendance at workshops and conferences that focus on the use of technology in the teaching of reading, which is essential to enhancing teaching and student learning.

Reading programs gain visibility when faculty speak at workshops, conferences, and meetings throughout the county and state. Ideally institutional support encourages all faculty, but especially basic skills faculty, to participate in workshops conferences, and meetings within their communities as they strive to increase efforts at improving literacy. Membership in professional organizations keeps faculty abreast of pedagogy in their disciplines. The following are some of the organizations representing faculty whose disciplines are central to basic skills instruction:

- California Association of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL)
- California Mathematics Council of Community Colleges (CMC[3])
- California Reading Association (CRA)
- College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA)
- English Council of California Two-Year Colleges (ECCTYC)
- International Reading Association (IRA)
- National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)
- Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

Research

With the large numbers of students entering our institutions without the skills needed for success, more attention and research should be directed towards finding ways to better serve these students. Unfortunately, we often place them in sink or swim situations because we lack research to guide our efforts towards better pedagogy. The Academic Senate survey indicated

that we lose many students who are assessed into basic skills courses and never enroll in any college course. Perhaps they are disturbed by their placement and decide they are unsuited for college, but research data to confirm or contradict this intuition is not available. System-wide we direct more than half of our entering students to basic skills courses; however, only 29 percent actually enroll in these courses (see Appendix). Students sometimes indicate that they decide to enroll in other courses and wait to take English or mathematics for a later time, a strategy unlikely to result in success in college-level classes that require college-level reading and writing skills.

To further complicate matters, it has been estimated that only about 50 percent of entering basic skills students persist to the next level. According to the Chancellor's Office *Fact Book*, less than 25 percent of basic skills students showed improvement in the three-year period from 1995/96 to 1997/98 (p.46). Why so few? We don't know. Most reporting colleges (76 percent) indicated that they had no means for following up on students who drop out. Some colleges (15 percent) reported having little research on pass rates or retention rates. Twenty-nine percent reported having no data on persistence rates. However, MIS requirements for Partnership for Excellence call for *all* participating colleges to collect and report this data. Clearly, we need more research to determine why students are not succeeding in basic skills courses if we seriously intend to increase success rates.

Another problem is that a number of colleges have no researchers on their staffs. Many faculty indicated they were trying to carry out research on their own in addition to their teaching duties. Clearly, more research linked to need would help with assessment necessary to improving pedagogy.

The difficulty in evaluating students' progress through basic skills sequences may be attributed to factors in addition to those identified above:

- Lack of follow-up on assessment and placement procedures,
- Inattention to support services,
- Variations in student demographics,
- Variations in levels and content of basic skills courses throughout the system, and
- Lack of agreement on the definition of student success.

What data we have on the statewide level point to needed improvements in how we support basic skills students. The Chancellor's Office 1999 report *The Basic Skills Mission: Successful Outcomes Achieved by Students with Basic Skills or ESL Experience* noted that on the average basic skills students are twice as likely to receive financial aid compared to all students and that students with disabilities are twice as likely to enroll in basic skills classes compared to all students. Such data, as well as responses on the survey, point to a need for increased attention to support services.

Levels of Basic Skills Courses

The Academic Senate survey reveals a great variety of levels of basic skills classes, with some colleges offering only one or two courses below freshman composition or elementary Algebra and others offering six or seven levels below college level. Questions often arise from students transferring from one college to another as to exactly where they belong. It is difficult for counselors and advisors to determine equivalent course placement for students who transfer from another college and are therefore not required to participate in the receiving college's assessment. The Community College Articulation Numbering (CCAN) project, supported by a grant from the Board of Governors, promises to provide a solution to this problem. It is designed to develop a third numbering system to align nontransferable courses among colleges just as the California Articulation Numbering (CAN) System does for transferable courses.

Faculty Development

Survey respondents reported that many instructors lack a passion for teaching the under-prepared student and even when the passion is there, the instructors feel isolated. One survey respondent wrote, "There really is a need for a support group for those who teach basic skills classes. There is a need to network [about] what is working and what is not as promising". Yet 35 percent of the colleges responding reported no faculty development activities for basic skills instructors, and respondents from five colleges had no knowledge about whether faculty development in basic skills instruction even existed.

Program Coordination

Basic skills students must master more than content if they are to persist to higher-level classes. One basic skills writing instructor regularly tells students that her job is to teach them to be better writers, better readers, and better students. A more global approach than is taken in transfer level teaching may be most appropriate for precollegiate students.

"Precollegiate courses are too restrictive", said another survey respondent, who suggested the development of comprehensive approaches to providing basic skills throughout the curriculum, integrating reading, comprehension, study skills, personal skills, cooperative skills, time management skills, mathematics skills, understanding systems, and communication skills. Further, a comprehensive approach could integrate issues of multiculturalism and discipline focus, as well as analytical skills, critical thinking, problem solving skills, and time management skills.

The development of these ideas and others require institutional support for curriculum development for basic skills, adequate assessment tools, discipline expertise, sufficient support services, and creativity to improve basic skills instruction.

EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

In spite of the multiplicity of problems pointed out by survey respondents, a surprisingly large number of exemplary practices were highlighted. One respondent spoke for all when he wrote, We do a lot, referring to the many effective approaches now employed. These include learning communities; tutorial assistance, in many cases involving peer tutoring; open entry-open exit self-paced courses; computer-assisted instruction; study group labs; multi-media and/or multi-sensory environments; paired or linked courses; mini- or short-term courses; portfolio grading; and program coordination.

Learning Communities

There is no one arrangement for successful learning communities. A variety of approaches are showing encouraging results. Colleges such as Cerritos College pair skills courses (e.g., Basic Writing) with courses in the content area (e.g., Sociology). Typically in this approach instructors team-teach and coordinate efforts with counseling and other support services. Other colleges (e.g., Fullerton College's Transfer Achievement Program, or TAP) use supplementary study groups for certain classes. In these sessions instructors and instructional aides help students with coursework. Students must attend these sessions to remain in the class.

San Jose City College's *Gateway* Program exemplifies a comprehensive model of the learning communities model. In this program students are scheduled into a combination of basic skills writing, mathematics, and counseling courses. Supplemental activities, such as field trips and speakers, maintain high student involvement and motivation. Individualized counseling and other support services are provided. This effort consistently achieves a success rate of well over 80 percent.

Bridge Programs

Many California community colleges offer bridge programs/classes designed to assist recent high school graduates in successful transition to college. The projects usually include both counseling/advisement and instructional services for participating students; the projects focus on their educational planning toward career goals, major selection, and transfer plans, as well as building basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, essential for college success. The goal is to provide a bridge for the students prior to their first college semester.

The benefits of this program are to:

- Improve articulation with local high schools,
- Increase student enrollment,
- Enhance student retention rate,

- Enhance student academic achievement, and
- Increase the transfer rate.

Tutorial Assistance

Tutoring describes a variety of activities used to promote student learning and supplement instruction. Tutors may be paraprofessionals, graduate students from nearby four-year institutions, or more typically community college students who have demonstrated mastery of the material they are asked to tutor.

Tutors work in different settings and under a variety of conditions. Typically they serve as aides in class, facilitate work groups and study groups outside of class, and work one-on-one with students in learning resource centers, labs, and even the cafeteria.

The survey indicates that tutors play an important role in a number of basic skills programs that respondents identified as exemplary. Although it is impossible to draw conclusions from this limited survey about the most successful use of tutors, there seems to be a trend in English and mathematics to incorporate tutoring as a course requirement in basic skills classes. For example, El Camino College's writing center provides tutors who work closely with instructors in the classrooms for basic skills reading and writing students. Diablo Valley College, Fresno City College, Riverside City College, and Saddleback College require that writing students participate in lab work with tutors as part of their class hours. Fullerton College, Diablo Valley College, and others require basic skills mathematics students to spend one hour in a mathematics lab staffed by tutors working under mathematics instructors. Most colleges have writing and mathematics labs or centers staffed by tutors and instructors that are open to individual or class use.

All community colleges use tutors in one way or another, but how effective have they proven to be? National studies indicate that unless tutors have undergone an extensive orientation program, the most that we can expect is short-term gains, where tutors help students complete assignments or a sequence of assignments. In this way tutors can help students pass a particular course, but not improve in their overall abilities to learn or apply course material in other courses and thus become more capable learners. A study funded by the EXXON Corporation and conducted by the National Center for Developmental Education between 1988 and 1994 concluded that there was a correlation between tutoring and student success only when comprehensive tutor training and evaluation were central to the tutoring program.

For those interested in developing effective tutoring programs, two nationally recognized publications are available: 1) a handbook for tutor training published by the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) and 2) the National Association for Developmental Education's *NADE Guidelines for Self-Evaluation* for several key features of developmental programs, including tutoring.

Reading Lab Programs

The Reading Lab programs provide postsecondary students with individualized instruction designed to assist them in gaining and/or improving skills and bring them up to college level. A wide range of lab courses helps students work on specific skills at their own pace. There are two types of such courses: lab courses to complement the reading skills taught in traditional reading classes, and lab courses that are independent of formal class structure designed to help students enrolled in classes across the curriculum. These lab courses do not have prerequisites and are, therefore, accessible to all students. Additionally, the lab classes are open-entry, open-exit, giving students the opportunity to register and to complete the class at anytime throughout the semester.

A reading lab serves as a resource center and information service responding to student, instructor, and community queries regarding assessment, placement recommendations, remediation resources, and other services. Lab instructors work to address students' reading problems. Programs on audiotape and videotape, computer programs, workbooks, and one-on-one instruction are among the tools available to help students build skills in such labs.

Several unique features are characteristic of lab learning experience for students. Individualized contacts allow students to work independently at their own pace; students may attend lab according to a flexible schedule to meet their individual needs. Reading labs also offer assistance to all students, from those with severe limitations to those who want to supplement well-developed skills. The Reading Lab courses are remedial/developmental and are, therefore, nontransferable and do not articulate with four-year universities.

Open Entry-Open Exit Courses

Many colleges report open entry-open exit arrangements individualized to serve students who need specialized help on specific subjects. Grossmont's Mathematics and Study Center has scheduled 73 hours of open tutoring per week. All basic skills mathematics instructors may schedule time in the center and all students are invited to drop in. The center uses computer-aided instruction, calculators, manipulatives, and both traditional and reform texts. To help students maintain and strengthen mathematics skills, particularly over the summer, the department has developed a review class via computer tutorials that is flexible and individualized. At Las Positas College, basic skills mathematics classes are offered in either the mastery learning/ programmed mode or in traditional lecture format. For writing students, Las Positas has revised its English 100 program to include six rather than five class hours, adding an additional lecture hour. Initially the program was self-paced with instructional assistant support and programmed instruction. In revising the program, the college will give greater emphasis to student-teacher interaction.

While it is important to adopt a coherent sequence of courses and supporting activities such as those above that lead to access to college-level curriculum, sufficient attention also needs to be paid to ensuring a programmatic set of offerings that comprise sufficient units to enable basic

skills students to qualify for financial aid.

Program Coordination

Developmental education (basic skills) needs to be seen as a collegewide commitment, conclude faculty at Los Medanos College (LMC), after researching developmental education. In addition to reading, visiting other colleges, and contacting experts, three faculty members attended and were certified by the Kellogg Institute for Developmental Educators, held by the National Center for Developmental Education. Subsequently, those faculty members developed an integrated approach to basic skills instruction that includes high levels of coordination rather than a centralized model. The LMC faculty noted that a successful approach is founded on the belief that everyone in a college is involved in the developmental growth of each student.

Utilizing Ruth Keimig's research on learning improvement as a conceptual framework, the LMC project recommended a four-level approach representing progressively higher levels of institutional commitment. . . which research documents as having greater potential for improving learning and teaching:

- Level One: Separate basic skills courses,
- Level Two: Learning assistance for individual students, including tutoring, supplemental instruction, and the establishment of a reading-writing center,
- Level Three: Course-related learning services, which offer supplemental instruction for students in high risk courses rather than targeting high risk students, and
- Level Four: Comprehensive learning systems, including the possibility of five different types of learning communities.

The authors, citing Keimig, argue that an approach that utilizes all of these increasing levels of support throughout the college curriculum has the highest potential for improved learning and student achievement. They conclude that the potential for widespread improvement is directly in proportion to how comprehensive and institutionalized the developmental program is.

This model moves away from identifying *students* as under-prepared, and suggests that it is the *institution* which is under-prepared to address the many individual needs of the wide variety of students over the course of their entire college career. Such a comprehensive approach essentially leads to a restructuring of the entire college to provide greater integration of student services and instruction. And, it posits the entire curriculum as in need of linkage with developmental courses.

It should be noted that at LMC the local academic senate organized the task force to address the needs of the increasing numbers of under-prepared students at the college. The academic senate worked with the administration to appoint the task force chair, ensure adequate reassigned time for the chair, and provide institutional support for the work of the task force. The task force proposals were subsequently adopted by the academic senate and submitted as formal recommendations to the administration. This effort exemplifies the leadership role that local academic senates can play in addressing basic skills issues on a systematic, collegewide basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving the learning of basic skills students involves a complex of factors. Certainly energetic, dedicated faculty with full institutional support is crucial to increasing student success. The list of recommendations below is far from exhaustive; however, it includes the thoughtful ideas expressed by the many respondents to the Academic Senate's survey on basic skills and provides direction to local academic senates working to address this critical part of our mission.

1. Local senates should lead their faculty and administration to view basic skills instruction as central to the community college mission.
2. Local senates should study the basic skills programs in their colleges and support basic skills instructors and program leaders by:
    a) recognizing basic skills students' particular needs for programs that include a personalized approach and supporting smaller class sizes;
    b) urging administration to provide adequate ongoing funding for basic skills programs;
    c) working with counseling faculty and matriculation officers to ensure that all assessment of incoming students includes consideration of valid multiple measures and effective counseling and advising;
    d) reviewing course content to assure that it is aligned with results of placement information;
    e) supporting the hiring of faculty who are not only discipline experts but who are also committed to basic skills learners;
    f) acknowledging the importance of quality reading instruction to all areas of the curriculum and supporting the allocation of optimum conditions for reading instruction, including adequate classroom space and equipment to provide an environment conducive to learning;
    g) advocating for specific research geared toward identifying methods to help basic skills students to receive appropriate placement, and to increase their retention and success rates; and
    h) providing faculty development opportunities to inform all faculty about needs and methods of instruction best suited to basic skills students.

3. Local senates should lead the college to take a more global approach to the instruction of basic skills students so that faculty from all areas participate in an across the-curriculum

approach to basic skills learners. Successful approaches involve student services faculty as well as faculty from all disciplines, teaching both general as well as vocational education. As with successful transfer efforts, serving basic skills students needs to be an institutional commitment.

See also *Transfer as an Institutional Commitment*, Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (Fall 1996).

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Appendix

BASIC SKILLS SURVEY RESULTS

In the Spring of 1998, the Academic Senate's Basic Skills Ad Hoc Committee conducted a survey to determine standards and practices in community college basic skills instruction and also to give colleges an opportunity to share their successes in basic skills instruction with others. Basic skills courses were identified as *pre-collegiate* and excluded ESL courses. Sixty-eight colleges responded. Below are the questions followed by a summary of the results:

1. *Approximately what percent of your entering students are directed to Basic Skills courses?* Responses varied considerably from Cabrillo's 95.4% to Citrus's 5%. Eighteen of the reporting colleges direct 50% or more to basic skills courses; nineteen directed less than 50%. Over all, 49% of all entering students among the 56 colleges who answered this question were directed to Basic Skills courses. Twelve (12) colleges could not answer this question.

2. *Approximately what percent of your entering students enroll in Basic Skills courses?* Again, responses varied considerably. Foothill enrolls 60% of their entering students in basic skills; both Mission and West Valley enroll only 6% of their entering students. The average of all reporting colleges was 29%. Twenty-two (22) colleges could not answer this question.

3(a). *For Basic Skills, does your college have research on the following: pass rates (C or better)?*
68 responses: Yes: 59 No: 8 Don't know: 1

3(b). *For Basic Skills, does your college have on the following: retention? (Number of students who complete courses with any grade)?*
68 responses: Yes: 59 No: 7 Don't know: 2

3(c). *For basic Skills, does your college have research on the following: persistence (number of students who enroll in subsequent courses)?*
68 responses: Yes: 45 No: 19 Don't know: 4

4. *Do you award certificates in Basic Skills?*
68 responses: Yes: 1 No: 65 Don't know: 2

5. *Does your college provide staff development for Basic Skills instruction?*
68 responses: Yes: 39 No: 24 Don't know: 5

6. *Does your college provide a means for following up on why students drop out of Basic Skills classes?*
   68 responses: Yes: 14 No: 52 Don't know: 2

7. *Are students who enroll in Basic Skills courses at your college provided with services such as tutoring, counseling, study groups?*
   65 responses: Yes: 64 No: 1

8. *If you are a multi-college district, is there any articulation or matching of basic skills courses within your district?*
   34 responses: Yes: 23 No: 10 Don't Know: 1 (the two other colleges in this district reported no.)

9. *Are students recommended for Basic Skills courses by use of:*
   A. An assessment test: 56 responses: Yes: 55 No: 1
   B. Multiple measures: 62 responses: Yes: 59 No: 2 Don't Know: 1
   C. Self selection: 55 responses: Yes: 45 No: 10

10. *How many courses/levels of Basic Skills courses do you have? (Only levels were counted except where only number of courses were provided.)*

	1 level	2 levels	3 levels	4 levels	5 levels	6 levels
A. Writing (39 rsps):	5	32	11	0	0	1
B. Reading (48 rsps):	6	25	11	5		1
C. Reading/Writing (22 rsps):	6	9	3	3		1
D. Math (58 rsps.):	10	13	17	11	5	1

11. *What is the number of full and part-time instructors teaching Basic Skills classes?*
    59 responses totals: Credit full-time: 662 Credit part-time: 858
    Noncredit full-time: 94 Noncredit part-time: 222

12. *What are the maximum enrollments per section in your Basic Skills classes?*

	Under 25	25-30	30-49	over 49
Writing (54 rsps):	7	34	11	2
Reading (55 rsps):	4	33	15	3
Reading/Writing (25 rsps):	4	12	9	
Math (50 rsps):	3	9	29	9

13. *Who is the best person to contact regarding your Basic Skills classes?*
    This information is available upon request.

14. *See appendix A for all comments from individual colleges.*

CONCLUSIONS

1&2. System-wide, we direct more than half of our students to Basic Skills courses (This percentage is just about the same as for the CSU system). However, only 29% actually enroll in these courses. Thus under our present placement procedures, a large percentage (21%) of those students who need Basic Skills instruction in order to succeed are not provided it. It is highly probable that most of these students do not succeed when they enroll in courses for which they are not prepared and thus depress our persistence rates. Clearly, we need to increase our efforts to better serve this group of students.

5. A number of colleges report having no research on pass rates (8 or 9, or 15%), retention rates (7-9, or 15%), and persistence rates (19-23, or 29%). These numbers would certainly be higher if all colleges had reported. Some colleges must begin collecting data so that they can assess their progress serving students who need Basic Skills instruction.

6. Basic Skills certificates are awarded by only one college, San Francisco. Because colleges have been free to make such awards but have chosen not to, there may not be much interest in them.

7. Most colleges provide some staff development in basic skills instruction, but 24 (35%) of those responding report no staff development for basic skills instruction, and 5 did not know whether it exists at their respective institutions. Considering how many of our students need basic skills instruction, we staff development in this area appears to be inadequate.

8. Most of the colleges responding (76%) do not have means for following up on students who drop out of basic skills courses. Thus we remain in the dark about why students are not completing basic skills courses and have little information to help direct us in planning how to reverse high attrition rates.

9. While most colleges provide some support for basic skills students, we should encourage those colleges that do not to develop better support services.

10. Nearly 30% of those from multi-college districts responding indicate that there is no articulation (or matching) of courses between or among colleges in their respective districts. Students who transfer from one college to another in the same district might experience confusion in selecting basic skills courses. A project funded by a BOG grant is currently working on an articulation system for basic skills courses similar to the CANS.

11. Almost all colleges use assessment testing and multiple measures to recommend placement in basic skills courses (Title 5 requires these means for matriculation). Self-selection is used by 81% of reporting college.

12. The range of levels of courses is relatively broad and perhaps a reflection of the diverse student populations we serve. Colleges with only one level of courses in writing, reading, and, math may need to determine whether they are offering courses suitable for all of their Basic Skills students.

13. This question did not yield responses from which useful conclusions could be drawn.

14. In credit programs, 43.5% of Basic Skills instructors are full-time instructors; 56.5% are part-time instructors. On the non-credit side, only 30% of Basic Skills instructors are full-time, and 70% are part-time. Clearly, the people who teach Basic Skills in our non-credit programs are overwhelmingly part-time. This disparity might reflect the level of funding for non-credit. For both credit and non-credit programs, there is a heavy reliance on part-time instructors.

15. The responses for enrollment per class in Basic Skills, again showed a range. It is clear that few colleges maintain relatively small class size in Basic Skills. For Basic Skills writing courses, 12% of responding colleges have class sizes of under 25 students, 62% have class sizes of between 25 and 30, and 24% have class sizes of over 30. Class sizes for Basic Skills reading were slightly larger: 12% of responding colleges have class sizes of under 25, 60% have class sizes between 25 and 30, and 32% have class sizes over 30. For Reading/writing combination classes 16% of reporting colleges have class sizes of below 25, 48% have class sizes between 25 and 30, and 36% have class sizes over 30. . For math, the numbers are even more disappointing: 24% of colleges have limits of 30 or under while 76% have limits of over 30.

    Many of those reporting over 30 use a lab or self-paced approach. Since approaches vary so much, including lecture, lab, tutoring, self-paced instruction, etc., drawing conclusions from the above numbers is difficult. However, it does appear that small lecture classes are relatively rare.